

Old and new encounters: the impact of managing diversity on services for children and young people in the UK

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Abstract

The Crime and Disorder Act, 1998 moved the youth justice system onto new terrain, tackling the prevention of children's and young people's offending by means of permanent partnerships of social workers, health professionals, educationalists, probation and police officers. Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) have become the vehicles of service delivery in the policy area of youth justice. After the Children Act 2004, YOTs have been located within statutory partnerships with a whole range of agencies (including those already represented in YOTs) in Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs).

Like any innovation, multi-agency working brings both opportunities and threats. Indeed, the agencies with a duty to cooperate in the policy realm of children and young people's policy are often conventional, long established organisations drawing upon even more traditional core professions. One of the consequences of this is a reluctance to cooperate due to essential incompatibilities between core practices and organisational cultures. Previous research by the authors (McAllister and Dudau, 2006) identified gender as an important element of misalignment between the core agencies in partnerships for children and young people: social services, schools, health authorities and the police. Specifically, we argued that if gender biased conventions represent one area of inter-organisational misunderstanding and potential dysfunction, this will impact on the quality of interaction and the outcomes for the partnership as a whole. Other research by one of the authors (McAllister and Stirbu 2007) identified the age and capacity of organisations as factors in demonstrating gender balance.

In this paper, we develop this existing research by first, exploring other measures of diversity (such as professional background and working patterns) as potential barriers in collaborations. Secondly, we explore whether the newer YOTs better deal with diversity than their more established partner agencies in LSCBs. Thirdly, we explore inter-agency dynamics between YOTs and their more traditional partners in the LSCBs. Finally, we draw some conclusions about the value and importance of managing diversity for effective multi-agency work.

Introduction

'Multi-agency working' is a new buzz term in UK policy making. Most public services here are being re-designed and implemented through the joint efforts of a range of agencies with stakes in respective policy areas. While this multi-agency paradigm benefits from the undisputed gain of avoiding duplication of effort by public agencies whilst tackling 'wicked' policy problems in a comprehensive manner (Loffler 2004), its widespread currency and popularity across almost all policy areas raises a suspicion that it might be based more on political rhetoric than on feasibility. Hence, the 'benevolent' perspective that identifies multi-agency cooperation as inherently 'beneficial and unproblematic' (Sampson et al 1988 in Burnett and Appleton 2004, p.35) is being challenged by the 'conspirational' perspective. The latter sees partnerships as nothing more than devices for policy centralization that allow the government to have better control over policy making via a single set of homogeneous aims and objectives across policy areas (Pratt 1989, p.245).

The criminal justice system was one of the last public services influenced by the new paradigm, although multi-agency work has featured in criminal justice since the Home Office Circular 8/1984, *Crime Prevention*. Since then, a new youth justice system has been established, with the passing of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 which requires agencies to come together in a collaborative effort 'to prevent offending by children and young persons' (Crime and Disorder Act 1998, s.37). The argument behind this drive to tackle crime from many directions simultaneously is the fact that children and young people's offending is thought to arise from many social problems traditionally tackled by separate agencies. For example, inadequate parenting was tackled by the social services, health problems by health agencies, and school performance monitored by teachers and educationalists. The 1998 Act, however, imposed a holistic approach in dealing with child and young offenders, by means of a partnership between all the agencies which used to deal with such problems in isolation: the police, social services, education, probation, health services, Connexions and the voluntary sector. Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) were established and, since 2000, function in all local authorities in England and Wales to deal in a comprehensible manner with young people who have offended, or are at risk of doing so.

In 2004, following a history of serious case reviews and official inquiries into the deaths and injury of children, YOTs were required by the Children Act to coordinate their activities with a number of other agencies, with the aim of safeguarding children and young people. This was to take place through coordinating activities via Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs). The challenge here has been twofold. On the one hand, YOTs are partnerships in themselves, with only a short history of seeking integration to be capable of acting as a single agency in a new partnership setting. On the other hand, the collective of organisations that form the new collaborative arrangement is very large, due to the 'preventative' element of the policy aim (safeguarding children), which makes coordination and alignment particularly difficult. Indeed, before the Children Act 2004, only a handful of organisations were involved in protecting children and young people. However, when it comes to safeguarding, these agencies are joined by a range of other new ones. Often, the core professions that feed into these organisations find themselves in a 'history of disagreement', for example, social workers and nurses ([Mullaney and Liston 1974](#)) or

social services, police and health occupations (Reder and Duncan 2003). These tensions between professionals are perpetuated in partnership working, often delaying full integration into the new safeguarding arrangements. Such tensions are rooted in fundamental differences between these professionals and their organisational histories around a range of issues, including professional training, preferred working patterns and gender representation.

Our previous research (McAllister and Dudau 2007) revealed that organisations with a strong gender bias tend to be at odds with one another, often delaying integration of collaborative efforts towards safeguarding children. Other research (McAllister and Stirbu 2007) revealed that long-established settings tend to have a higher gender-bias than newly-established ones. Our purpose here is to develop this hypothesis by first, exploring other measures of diversity (such as professional background and working patterns) as potential barriers in collaborations. Secondly, we explore whether the newer YOTs deal with diversity better than their more established partner agencies in LSCBs. Thirdly, we will explore inter-agency dynamics between YOTs and their more traditional partners in the LSCBs. Finally, we will draw some conclusions about the value of managing diversity for effective multi-agency work.

Background: Managing diversity in organisations

In this paper, we use Larkey's (1996) view on diversity and assume it refers to *"differences in worldviews or subjective culture, resulting in potential behavioural differences between cultural groups"* (p.465). Cultural groups are in turn defined by Willcoxson and Milett (2000) to be historically developed groups with own recognised identity, sharing the same beliefs and patterns of behaviour that seem *"effective in helping them interpret and interact with the world in which they find themselves"* (pp.92). We also regard it as important to note that cultural groups usually *"give people a sense of belonging through collective identity"* (*ibid.*), and that acknowledging the differences that they embrace makes people feel valued and allow their talents to be fully utilised. Kandola and Fullerton (1998, pp.8) indicate that the differences that remain at the root of culture group formation in organisations are around sex, age, background, race, disability, personality and work style. To these, other theorists (e.g. [Bissett 2004](#), Fischer 2007) add sexual orientation, religion, values and beliefs, while Herriott and Pemberton (1995) simply summarise them all by 'different frameworks of knowledge'. This paper refers to diversity management in terms of gender representation, professional background and work style, as the most measurable variables in the context of our particular case study.

In today's diverse society, it is crucial for organisations to accommodate all the cultural groups effectively in order to be able to speak for and to stakeholders in one voice. This is, of course, not an easy task. [Bassett-Jones \(2005\)](#) refers to this as to *"the paradox of diversity management, creativity and innovation"* in that, although diversity is a source of creativity, it is also one of misunderstanding, suspicion and conflict, which might lead to absenteeism, low morale and loss of competitiveness. Indeed, diversity can create both positive and negative outcomes for organisations, because it ultimately influences group processes such as communication, conflict, cohesion, information and creativity (Kochan et al 2003). Organisational culture is

one of the factors that can determine how diversity is handled to target positive organisational outcomes.

Starting from organisational culture, Cox (1991) classifies organisations as monolithic, plural or multi-cultural. They range from having very homogenous to very heterogeneous compositions. But it is not enough for an organisation overall to be of one type or another for it to be effective at managing diversity. Workgroups within organisations can also be of a monolithic, plural or multi-cultural type ([Larkey 1996](#)) and this, too, has an impact on the ‘voice’ the organisation projects to the outside world. For example, most of the organisations in LSCBs have core groups of professionals who define them. Hence, it is as important for these core professionals to be multi-cultural in their workforce composition and world view, as it is for the organisations overall. Further exploring this argument, the general practitioner is essential to a GP practice, for the latter can scarcely survive without its administrative staff, but would certainly lose meaning without its general practitioner. Similarly, schools could not operate without teachers, police stations without police officers, hospitals without doctors and nurses, education departments without educationalists and social services without social workers. It is not enough for agencies like education, social services, the police, hospitals and surgeries to be open to diversity. In order to be interacting properly with stakeholders while delegating their most representative professionals, these workgroups must tackle diversity properly too. Therefore organisational settings alone are not enough to succeed in creating a diversity friendly environment; professional training and ethos play a distinct, essential role in how professionals manage diversity in their organisations.

In 30 years of formal commitment to equal opportunities in the UK public sector (see Dickens 2007), some public agencies still make very little progress towards achieving that ideal balance of gender, ethnicity, social background, work patterns and so on. It is argued elsewhere (McAllister and Stirbu 2007) that there is a correlation between the age of political arenas or institutions and the degree to which they embrace equality. For example, there is a difference between those organisations or institutions which are first, smaller than the norm and secondly, that acknowledge different political goals. In the case of Wales’s relatively new devolved institutional framework for example, there have been significant developments in gender equality, some as a result of the original and unique statutory duties upon the National Assembly for Wales (Assembly) to “promote equality of opportunity” in the conduct of its business and in the exercise of its functions. Alongside these, the Assembly, its executive (the Welsh Assembly Government) and its sponsored bodies (AGSBs) have experimented with various schemes or devices designed to institutionalise or promote equality within policy-making and behaviour. These include a commitment to mainstreaming, the use of gender impact assessments, and gender budgeting techniques. Alongside this “hardware”, many formal and informal cultural and behavioural shifts have helped create a more positive climate for advancing equality. Juxtaposed with the House of Commons, the presence of a majority of elected women politicians in the second Assembly (31 out of 60), recent innovations in Wales underline the potential of new political spaces (McAllister and Stirbu, 2007). Applying this to this paper’s main argument, it is supposedly easier for newer agencies, created whilst the equal opportunities and equality debates were unfolding, to embrace diversity, than it is for older (and invariably larger, for example, social services, health authorities, education

and the police) agencies to accommodate a new paradigm with their long-established cultures and practices.

In this research, we regard managing diversity (MD) as going beyond equal opportunity (EO) duties. If the latter is hard to achieve for some organisations and professions, the former is arguably even harder to embrace. Wilson and Iles (1999) make a succinct comparison of the two paradigms. While EO is imposed from the outside, MD is essentially internally driven, for it is perceived as an investment in creativity and in creating smooth communication channels both internally and with stakeholders. In this sense, it is usually more strategic than the EO. The difference, under the MD paradigm, is perceived as an asset, and an organisational and professional culture which celebrates difference is supposedly more inclusive and more creative ([Bassett-Jones 2005](#)).

We will show how the new paradigm is being embraced by one of the newer organisations in local safeguarding children boards, the YOTs, in order to compare it with the more established partners and discuss significant differences. In analysing diversity management, we focus on organisational and professional culture(s), gender balance, and work patterns.

Multi-agency working in the youth justice systems in England and Wales

In many ways, multi-agency settings are ideal environments in which to base a study on diversity management, due to the fact that partnerships themselves represent diversity 'in action'. LSCBs can be conceptualised as points of interaction between a variety of cultures—both organisational and professional. In this context, it is especially important for the organisations and for the professions represented in this board to be open to diversity and open to new ideas that are thrown into the mix from various perspectives.

YOTs are one peculiar type of organisation within the wider local safeguarding multi-agency arrangements, primarily because they are arenas for cultural interactions themselves. Thus, it might be argued that YOTs are used to the concept of diversity and hence a potentially receptive partner in LSCBs. Indeed, in a wider study¹ of communication and collaboration patterns between LSCB partners, YOTs were not mentioned by interviewees as 'reluctant' partners.

The grounds for positive engagement with diversity are created by the diverse statutory YOT membership: social services, education, probation services, the police, the Connexions and the health authorities. This brings together, not only a diversity of organisations, but also one of professions and, above all, a diversity of 'frameworks of knowledge', as [Herriott and Pemberton \(1995\)](#) call it. Pessimistically, some critics felt that the 'melting pot of principles and ideologies' contained in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 were only a cover up for the government's intentions to replace the culture of welfare with one of punishment when dealing with children and young people at risk of offending ([Gelsthorpe and Morris 2002](#), [Pitts 2001](#)). This would have been an unwelcome development for many professionals ([Pitts 2001](#)), especially for those coming from a welfare standpoint (e.g. social services). More optimistically

however, secondary research ([Burnett and Appleton 2004](#)) indicates that the welfare culture has prevailed over the punitive aspect of the law. This was due to the fact that partners, new to the type of work that YOTs did, largely embraced the ethos generated by social workers, who had been doing these areas of work already.

YOTs were introduced by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 with the specific aim 'to prevent offending by children and young persons' aged 10 to 17 (Crime and Disorder Act 1998, s.37). The safeguarding element in this generic goal prompted the need for multi-agency policy delivery. Since it is clear that young people might offend as a result of poor life experiences related to, for example, poverty (for example, inadequate educational attainment, poor health and social conditions, and inappropriate parental control), the outcome of multi-agency efforts to correct these issues and to prevent re-offending was a commonsensical approach to youth service policy delivery. By incorporating representatives from a wide range of services, YOTs were designed to respond in a comprehensible way to the needs of young people who had either offended or were at risk of doing so. This response takes the form of preventative measures, but also monitoring and reacting activities. Thus, YOTs prevent young people from offending in the first instance through a range of targeted programmes. Then, they assess young people coming into the youth system in order to establish what the circumstances of their offending are. They also deliver intervention programmes to tackle the causes of the young person's offending and enable them to carry out some sort of reparation. Finally, they provide supervising officers for young people who are given community penalties orders by the Court and for those who receive custodial sentences.

While this is the general background for both England and Wales, specific operational differences in Wales arise from the close relationship that YOTs have with the Welsh Assembly Government, the devolved executive. The Assembly Government does not have devolved powers in youth services, but it did produce a Youth Offending Strategy for Wales (WAG and YJB 2004) that set Wales on a slightly different ground to England in the way in which YOTs are funded and operate (there is no equivalent document for England). The rationale for a specific strategy for Wales lies in the characteristics of the country: largely rural, with many pockets of poverty that might yield offending behaviour, and substance misuse in particular (as revealed by Interviewee Six). Consequently, Welsh YOTs will have partly different key performance indicators from English YOTs by 2009.

Methodology

This paper originated from an in-depth study of the safeguarding children arrangements in a local authority in Merseyside, north west England. Non-participant observation of the LSCB meetings revealed consistent tensions between certain organisations represented in the Board. In examining the core professionals and their organisations in the LSCB, it was apparent that the institutional rigidity created by the long-established professional and organisational culture that explains the difficulties faced in coordinating activities effectively. This then spills over to affect the effectiveness of LSCB work.

The decision to focus on the YOTs as very ‘young’ LSCB partners was based on the need to observe how flexibility is exercised in a less traditional and arguably, less rigid organisation. Our hypothesis was that flexible organisations are more likely to be pluralistic and diverse than rigid ones. To this end, we reviewed academic literature and policy documents around the youth justice system in England and Wales, as well as around diversity management itself. We extracted some issues that were worth further investigation and conducted seven interviews with senior YOT officers in England and Wales: one YOT management board chair, two YOT managers, one deputy YOT manager, one operational manager and one probation senior officer (Adina; if he is not already included in this number, we could add Wil as an interviewee given he has responded to several info requests- up to you if you want to change to two?). Five of our interviewees are based in a local authority in north west England. We contrasted our findings from these interviews with the combined viewpoint of the other two interviewees in Wales. This technique has confirmed some common arrangements for Wales, but has also elucidated some differences arising from the devolved powers of the Welsh Assembly Government.

Our interviews helped us develop an understanding of how YOTs are organised and function ‘in practice’. This is because the statutory requirements are translated into practice rather differently by different local authorities. Examples of such local particularities that could not be found in the law or policy documents or on YOT official web pages are: working routines, dominating professional ethos or personalities, and YOT components that are no statutory partners as set out by Crime and Disorder Act 1998. These and other issues were raised during our interviews. Our interviewing approach was similar to grounding theory techniques: we did not have a rigid set of questions that we asked all interviewees. Rather, we started from general statements and allowed interviewees to develop ideas, revealing specific things that then we cross-referenced with the next interviews and with further reviews of the literature.

Managing diversity in Youth Offending Teams – *‘fruit cakes like grandma used to make’*

Influential previous research (Burnett and Appleton 2004) came across two metaphors that described multi-agency work in the new youth justice system in England and Wales - ‘fruit salad’ and ‘fruit cake’. The former metaphor stands for a collection of disparate organisations that cooperate, but do not truly collaborate -in the sense implied by Mandell and Steelman 2003². The latter metaphor, however, indicates a high level of integration of organisations represented by professionals who collaborate and are fully committed to the new youth justice mix.

Asked to choose between two metaphors - ‘fruit salad’ or ‘fruit cake’ - to illustrate the degree of integration in their teams, all our interviewees opted for the latter. Interviewee Four, however, appreciated that the cake is one “*with a strong lemon flavour, like grandma used to make*”! By that, they implied that, although the team is well integrated and speaks in one voice, the social work ethos prevails over the other cultures in the team. The reference to what “*grandma used to make*” is for the fact that the social work ethos in YOTs is not identical to that in social services today.

Rather it is slightly exaggerated, as it was perceived to be in the 1980s – idealistic and driven by a view that *“kids are alright, it’s the society that must be changed”*. This ethos, however, did not affect other professions in the sense of de-skilling.

One phenomenon identified in literature as consequence of the new youth justice arrangements is de-skilling. The pessimistic perspective of this coined the term ‘de-skilling’ (Pitts 2001), while the optimists conceptualised it as a ‘merging of skills’ (Burnett and Appleton 2004). In both interpretations however, it is understood that the educationalists, health workers and social workers in YOTs will, in time, have different skills and occupational cultures to their former colleagues in Children’s Services. Similarly, probation and police officers in YOT are likely to lose some of their specific professional skills and take on other, more welfare oriented ones from the YOT mix. This might be why for these two professions, there is a maximum period for secondment into YOT (a maximum of three years in the local authority areas investigated here). This is to prevent an insurmountable professional barrier being erected between their original professions. This is a local arrangement by local probation boards rather than the result of national legislation, yet one that makes integration of this profession in YOTs rather difficult (do we have evidence for this- I thought Wil said not?). However, as Interviewee Seven pointed out, *“if someone [from probation] stays in a YOT too long they become just another social worker, they don’t have the probation perspective any more”*, implying that professionals outside YOTs feel there might not be much benefit in having YOTs as ‘fruit cakes’ in the first place. However, the YOT perspective, as given by our other interviewees, is that truly integrated interagency work, while retaining professionals’ original, work is this right term? ethos, is similar to a medical condition of multiple personas (Interviewee Two). From this, it would seem that YOT professionals opt for integration into one homogeneous ‘YOT culture’, something that we were told has happened in some local authority areas.

In terms of professional representation, there are two types of YOT workers: those that come from another agency (sometimes seconded, other times permanently transferred to YOTs) and YOT workers that are recruited from outside the system, via the usual channels of open recruitment. When we refer to professional representation, we are referring to the former category, as it is these that owe their YOT worker status to belonging to one professional group and one organisation or another. Amongst these, social workers form the vast majority, approximately seven times more numerous than any other professional category (YJB 2006). The YOT workers recruited from the outside normally have some background in youth work or related areas (Interviewee Six), which only strengthens the welfare ethos bias.

Data from the YJB Annual Statistics 2005-2006 describes the professional representation in YOTS, but also the contract status of YOT workers and their gender. Contract type patterns show great reliance on volunteers’ work in YOTs (the national average is 43 per cent of the workforce). Practitioners come second as 33.92 per cent, followed by sessional workers (11 per cent), administrative staff (9 per cent), managers (5 per cent) and students and trainees (2 per cent). The volunteering work preponderance shows high turnover of YOT workers which, on the one hand, confirms the theory of de-skilling in YOTs, but, on the other hand, demonstrates high resilience based on flexibility. The reliance on unpaid work suggests flexibility in YOTs, an impression strengthened by further alternative work schedules for YOT

workers. Indeed, all our interviewees revealed that they worked under the principle of flexible timing, due to the need to be responsive outside formal nine to five 'working hours'. Since YOT workers are expected to work in the evenings as well as weekends and, since some times are busier than others, they are likely to be more autonomous in their time management.

In terms of gender, there are almost twice as many women (66%) as men (34%) in English and Welsh YOTs. As far as the management hierarchy goes, however, the bias is in favour of men. National statistics show that there are two men for every three women in strategic management positions in YOTs. In operational management, however, the ratio favours women at 4:3 ratio compared to male operational managers. Another occupational area of empirical gender bias is administration: there are nine times as many women as men in administrative posts. This clearly skews the total gender profile of the organisation. Practitioners, trainees and volunteers are also mostly women (2:1), while senior practitioners' and students' numbers are balanced between the two sexes, with only a slight imbalance towards the women. The fact that the balance improves in this case can be explained using the 'glass escalator' phenomenon advanced by established literature on gender ([Williams 1992](#)) by which men are frequently able to advance further and faster than their female counterparts in jobs that are traditionally associated with women. The fact that women dominate the YOT workforce overall can thus be explained in terms of two factors: administrative culture and welfare culture. Firstly, the gender biased administrative culture skews the numbers overall, for administrative staff make up 8.63 per cent of the total workforce. Secondly, the dominant specialist profession represented in YOTs is that of social workers (YJB 2006) – also massively gender distinguished (as exemplified in the next section of this paper). If we are to remove these major skewers of gender data, the gender balance in YOTs improves considerably.

Managing diversity in partner agencies within LSCBs

Professional and organisational cultures

The professions that dominate LSCBs are almost identical to those that dominate YOTs: social workers, teachers, nurses, doctors and police officers. The key organisations in these settings are: Social Services, Education, Health Authorities and the Police. These organisations are key partners largely because they play an essential role in child protection, still at the core of the newer safeguarding arrangements (DES 2007).

The key organisations in LSCBs are almost defined by the professional cultures that sit at their core. Hence, for example, police officers define the organisational culture of the police as an organisation. Similarly, GP practices work around a general practitioner's ethos and schools, around teachers' professional ethos. NHS Trusts function around the occupational culture of doctors and nurses (however different these are), and the newer Children Services around the very different 'frameworks of knowledge' of educationalists and of social workers.

Overall, in LSCBs, social work seems to be the predominant voice, with the caveat that occasionally others stand out. Social work's general dominance can be explained through the general welfare ethos of the policy area itself (children and young people), but also because several social services departments (for example, Adult Services, Safeguarding, Youth Services, Child Protection, Housing) get to be represented in the board at the same time. Hence, they often end up dominating the discussion at the expense of other professions. Indeed, our previous research indicates that educationalists often feel restricted in their contributions to the board in the light of the over-powering influence of social workers. Similar views came from both the voluntary sector and from the police.

The five professions that dominate LSCBs are also key components of YOTs too. This technically makes YOTs a partner compatible with the ethos of the other LSCB partners (as confirmed by Interviewees One, Two and Three). However, there is a debate to be had as to whether YOTs can retain that diversity of flavours while still building a single, homogeneous organisational culture.

Work patterns

No other agency in the LSCB has such a high reliance on volunteer work as the YOTs. It is a goal for the police, while Children Services sometimes outsource work to local voluntary and community sector organisations. But none of these manage to have reached as large a degree of flexibility as to entrust much of their work to unpaid workers.

In terms of part-time and flexible work, this is quite common amongst GPs – especially female (DoH 2006b), but a rarity amongst the police officers (Metropolitan Police 2005) and in NHS Trusts' doctors and nurses (NHS 2005). In schools, some teachers work part-time (DfES 2002), but more flexible timing is unpractical due to school hours. Children's Services promotes flexible working only for the front-line social workers (DoH 2006a).

Gender representation

Workforce data in Children Services Authorities (DoH 2006a) compares male and female staff numbers. Data from 2005 shows an overwhelming dominance of women (81 per cent), both amongst practitioners and amongst managers. The gender gap is obvious here and may come from the welfare culture in the profession. The same explanation can be applied in education too, where there are 88 per cent female teachers in nursery and primary school, with the gap narrowing for secondary school and upwards (DfES 2002).

The nursing profession also reflects a strong gender bias, similar to that of nursery and primary school teachers: 89 per cent of the qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff are women and only 11 per cent men (DoH 2005). From these, registered nurses working with children are predominantly female (96 per cent), whilst amongst the nursing consultants in paediatric nursing, 81 per cent are women (DoH 2005). Although female GPs represent 40 per cent of the totality of GPs in Primary Care Trusts (PCTs), nearly half of them work part-time in comparison with only 12 per cent of the men (DoH, 2006b).

With the caveat of limited available statistics³, the police service is male dominated overall (Metropolitan Police, 2005). The figures for London show a percentage of 81 per cent men officers. Over the past five years, this number has only decreased by 4 per cent as a result of attempts to encourage a higher representation of women in the service...

Clearly, the key professions that interact in children's safeguard matters are gender imbalanced. Where they form the core of their organisations, technically these too become gender segregated. Various measures are being taken to narrow the gender gap in these organisations (some positive action measures, but also changes in education and professional training), however change is likely to be very slow. The fact that these professions are heavily gender segregated working in close interaction in the same policy area is significant because they might have opposite world views and opposite cultural stands. When collaboration is at stake, this can impinge on the effectiveness of policy implementation, with effects on policy outcomes for children and young people.

YOTs work with the aforementioned core agencies and professions in delivering outcomes for children and young people. However, they represent a rather different picture of diversity, arguably due to the fact that they are newer organisations, but also that they contain an amalgam of all these core professions. Even though there are more social workers (especially youth workers) represented in YOTs than any other occupational category, they do not dominate the organisation overall. In essence, YOTs represent a blend of cultures, which precludes one from obstructing the others.

Managing diversity to create collaborative capabilities

The benefits of a diverse workforce are widely acknowledged: people feel valued when they are accepted and their differences celebrated. It follows therefore that they feel obstructed when their personal and professional freedom is impinged by organisational policies that are most compatible with the dominant culture in organisation. That YOTs are agencies formed through the collaborative effort⁴ of a few organisations already in place is a generic indication that multi-culturality⁵ has a valid chance in this structural context. Further findings add weight to this.

First, the fear that the punitive element of the Crime and Disorder Law (1998) will take over the welfare approach of tackling young offenders, to the displeasure of some professionals, was proved wrong. Both primary and secondary (Burnett and Appleton 2004) data confirm that firstly, professionals took on their new YOT posts rather enthusiastically and secondly, that the welfare culture has prevailed over the punitive aspect of the law. As many theorists have remarked (Burnett and Appleton 2004), the danger here is that the welfare ethos has been simply borrowed from the more numerous social workers by the less well represented - and often less experienced in dealing with youth crime - professions in YOTs. This was denied by some of our interviewees, on the grounds that social workers were not the only ones that had experience in this work area before 1998. Two interviewees indicated that probation, too, was used to tackling crime while retaining a social work focus and, in a sense, embraced two ethical positions: the welfare approach of 'the kids are alright' and the

punitive ethos specific to the police. Other interviewees mentioned that Connexions did very similar integrationist work with youngsters at risk of offending as the YOTs do now.

Secondly, the fact that YOTs rely on volunteers and promote flexible working is a clear indication that they embrace the work flexibility aspect of diversity management. This suggests the idea of resilience and robustness of the organisation, useful qualities to possess in an ever-changing policy environment, and even more so in continuous interaction with other agencies in partnership settings such as the LSCBs.

Finally, although there are twice as many women as men in the composition of YOTs is largely testimony to the fact that, *“gender representation in YOT is really a reflection of gender representation in the component organisations”* (Interviewee Two). Since social workers form the majority of professionals in YOTs, and since this profession is heavily gender biased towards females, then it is not unexpected to find a gender bias in YOTs. Another factor that explains the female domination in YOTs is the large presence of women-dominated administrative staff (8.66 per cent of YOT workforce, 90 per cent female). If we eliminate these powerful skewers, however YOTs become rather more gender balanced.

More established agencies in LSCB, however, appear to be inflexible in all three of the criteria we utilised. First, their professional cultures are extremely strong and they have grown to define the organisational culture overall. LSCBs are arenas where this professional ‘pride’ is displayed regularly and often in ways that impede effective cooperation.

Most of the core agencies in LSCBs cannot apply flexible timing in their organisational practices, often due to the incompatibility with the nature of the job (particularly in schools and hospitals). Although reliance on flexible staff (voluntary or sessional) is increasing in some organisations (for example, the police), it is still early days for most of them, although it is very high in YOTs.

Nonetheless, the key professions and organisations in LSCB are strongly gender biased: social workers are dominantly female (approximately 70 per cent), primary school and nursery teachers are mostly female, too (approximately 85 per cent), nurses are overwhelmingly female (89 per cent) while police is mostly male dominated (81 per cent). GPs are numerically only marginally male dominated, but actually, as discussed, before, the bias is much stronger than this.

LSCBs are heavily reliant on the ability of the partner organisations to align their activities, operations and cultures to the common goal of safeguarding children and young people. This is the essence of creating ‘collaborative capabilities’ (Huxham 1993) to successfully react to future complex challenges in policy making. YOTs have been proven here to be a facilitating partner, ones that manage diversity well, far better than their more established partners, and hence can become pivotal in multi-agency working in LSCBs.

Conclusions

Partnership working in the UK has become an indispensable vehicle for achieving the aim of delivering policies to targeted service users in a seamless manner. Traditional organisations face specific challenges from this new way of working. They sit in various partnerships to serve different targeted consumers' groups. Hence, the creation of 'collaborative capabilities' has become as important as the departmental work upon which they are traditionally inspected.

In the policy area of safeguarding children and young people, this sort of integration has proven to be a major challenge, largely due to the rigid nature of the core agencies which have a duty to cooperate. To counterbalance, newer agencies like the YOTs are, as we have shown, 'diversity astute' and hence, more flexible and potentially easier to work with in collaborative settings. We have measured their ability to manage diversity effectively using three variables: their ability to integrate professions, their ability to promote flexible working, and that of creating gender balance.

Although some YOTs allow the voice of the welfare based social work to dominate, others do not and rather, speak in a single integrated voice across the professions?. Even in those where social workers dominate, they do not necessarily impose controls over the other professions. Although YOTs slightly favour females, this is much less so than their LSCB partners. Finally, they actively promote flexible working, attract an impressive amount of voluntary workers. This needs a general summing up regarding our hypothesis about gender and YOTs I think?

The findings of this paper offer further proof that newer agencies find it easier to manage diversity effectively than older institutions and, moreover, often do it willingly without outside intervention. Through organisations like YOTs, the LSCBs manage to find that delicate overall balance between distinctive professional voices and delivering public services effectively to children and young people.

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Endnotes:

¹ On-going PhD research about the barriers to collaboration between agencies in local safeguarding arrangements for children and young people.

² Mandell and Steelman (2003) conceptualised collaboration as an activity that occurs in network partnerships that work together to a superior level of integration. Coordination and cooperation present lower degrees of integration than collaboration.

³ The peculiar organisation of police in England and Wales, often statistics are not available other than for disparate local authority areas. Hence, we had to refer to the data available for Metropolitan Police and extrapolate out from that, accepting that the difference between London and the rest of the country in terms of police data cannot vary dramatically.

⁴ In the sense advocated by Mandell and Steelman (2003)

⁵ In the sense indicated by Cox (1991)